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ABSTRACT

The study of United States journalism history has been dominated by an interpretation founded on the idea of progress. This interpretation is based on the assumption that the essential characteristics of the press are thorough, fast, accurate news reporting: enlightened, effective presentation of opinion: entertainment: and press independence and responsibility. It holds that journalism history has been developing continually and inevitably to this ultimate condition. This confidence in developmental progress has accounted for the lack of diversity among historians and has been responsible for most of the major interpretative fallacies. Because of the dominance of the progress interpretation, the study of journalism history has grown stagnant, and because it attempts to explain journalism history by contemporary conditions, it has created a narrow, superficial, and distorted picture. This view needs to be corrected, and one way to do this is to adopt an interpretation of journalism history that is based on the fact that the press at different periods has served different purposes and that those purposes were a result of the philosophies that have dominated American intellect and culture at different times. Approaching the history of journalism from the perspective of press purposes should help create an understanding of the essential nature of the press, provide new insights, and encourage fresh explanations. (FL)

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THE PURPOSES OF THE PRESS:

A RE-INTERPRETATION OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM HISTORY

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THE PURPOSES OF THE PRESS:
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The study of journalism history rarely has been praised for its interpretative vitality. It has been marked by repetitive works that provide no new significant insights and certainly few exciting explanations. For years it has been criticized or, worse, neglected as one routine biography of an editor has been piled on another and as routine histories of newspapers have enlarged the pile. Recently, journalism historians have begun to express more and more concern for the problems. At issue is the very foundation of historical study: the school of thought from which interpretations flow.

Although critics have described part of the problem with the traditional approach to journalism history, so far they have failed to fully analyze the essential problem. The primary fallacy of historical study has been a belief in the developmental progress of the press. Our paper analyzes the progress interpretation and provides an alternative interpretation.

In the past decade, two historians—James Carey and Joseph McKerns—have received considerable attention for their attempts at historical criticism and interpretation. While the positive response given to Carey and McKerns is encouraging in regard to historians' openness to new insights and explanations, proposals for new approaches to journalism history are not new.

In 1945 Sidney Kobre argued that historians had failed by treating the press as an isolated institution. He suggested that historians relate the press to society. Emphasis, he reasoned, should be on the political, economic, geographical, technological, cultural, and social factors that have affected journalism history, rather than just on the facts and chronology of the internal workings of the press.[1]

In 1959 the eminent historian Allan Nevins, in an address before this organization, claimed that historical study in journalism had been uncritical and even dishonest. He pointed to many problems, but his strongest complaint was against the historical neglect of news coverage. Journalism history, he suggested, should be studied in terms of the press' "relation to the workings of democratic government,"[2] with the recognition that it is through news that the press makes its greatest contribution to democracy.

Carey has criticized historians' reliance on what he calls the "Whig" interpretation, a concept he borrows from the English historiographer Herbert Butterfield. The Whig interpretation, Carey argues, views journalism history as the slow but steady "expansion of freedom and knowledge," often viewed in terms of "individual rights" and "the public's right to know." It assumes that the entire history "is framed by those large impersonal faces [sic] buffeting the press: industrialization, urbanization and mass democracy."[3]

McKerns has argued that the study of journalism history has been dominated by a "Progressive" interpretation, in which "the conflict is between 'good' and 'evil.'" "Good" has been synonymous with "liberalism, freedom, democracy and libertarianism," and "evil" has been identified as "conservatism, repression, aristocracy and authoritarianism."[4]

Despite criticism, no alternative to the traditional interpretation has been adequately developed.[5] Carey excited interest with his tentative proposal for a "cultural history," the central focus of which was to be the "idea of a report."[6] McKerns proposed an interpretation concerned with "the way in which the press has fostered and/or conveyed to society the dominant conservative ideas which run throughout the nation's history."[7] While being notable for directing attention to the need for examining historical study, neither proposal, unfortunately, accounts for more than a limited redress of the writing of journalism history. McKerns' proposal, for instance, suggests a counter approach to examining some aspects of journalism; but its primary concern is with the press' relationship with, and reaction to, conservative/liberal ideology. Likewise, Carey's "report" approach is limited by its singularity: only one part of journalism is considered.[8]

Although such criticism has been healthy for the study of journalism history, the fundamental problem has not been analyzed. While a concern for such factors as industrialization, press freedom, and democracy has been prevalent among historians, the primary fallacy has been the belief that journalism historically has been developing continually and inevitably to some ultimate condition. This confidence in developmental progress has been pervasive in historical interpretation, has accounted for the lack of diversity among historians, and has been responsible for most of the major interpretative fallacies.

Carey's proposal, even though criticizing traditional interpretation, offers no apparent alternative to the developmental theory; and one is left to wonder whether this absence is not an implied acceptance of the fundamentals of traditional theory. "One more history written against the background of the Whig interpretation," writes Carey, "would not be wrong—just redundant."[9] Kobre's "sociological approach" is concerned with the press as a "changing, evolving" institution.[10] Kobre encouraged studies that would "present the evolutionary character, the step-by-step growth of the headline, of the editorial," and so on.[11]

What is needed is an interpretation that avoids the fundamental problem of the progress approach and accounts for the essence of journalism history in other terms. The problem with any new history written within the developmental framework is that the framework itself, while certainly offering one way of looking at history, is based on faulty assumptions. For any interpretation—such as McKerns'—not based on these assumptions to offer a worthwhile alternative, it must be able to account for more than a limited area of journalism history and should place the entire story in proper perspective.

Until historians recognize the elemental error in the progress interpretation, we will continue to err in understanding journalism history. The line of reasoning that holds that journalism history has been the story of development—presumed by some historians to be <u>inexorable</u> development—necessarily contends that American journalism is closer to

its ultimate goal today than it ever has been. Since that goal is presumed to be good, it is assumed that today's journalism is better than at any earlier period. Thus, historians tend to measure the journalism of the past in terms of today's standards. Because of an anachronistic historical perception, these essential standards are assumed to be thorough, fast, accurate news reporting, coupled to some extent with enlightened, effective presentation of opinion and with some entertainment material, along with a combination of press independence and responsibility.

The most obvious fallacy of this approach is that it attempts to explain the press of the past by standards that did not exist. But it is of dubious validity to evaluate past journalists by today' standards when they did not know what those standards would be. Such is no more legitimate than it would be for historians a century or two from now to explain today's journalism in terms of how it contributed (or did not contribute) to the development of standards that might or will exist in 2181 A. D.

The problems that the developmental approach presents can be illustrated by mention of a few of the questionable explanations historians give of episodes in journalism history. The significance of the instances mentioned here varies, but we present a range of them simply to illustrate the pervasiveness of the errors caused by the progress approach.

*James Franklin was a hero, as the first American journalist to "unshackle" the American press from English authority.

This evaluation of Franklin is based in terms of the development of press freedom and subordinates the facts that his vanity distorted his journalism, that he conducted a crusade against smallpox inoculation on the specious grounds of his religious differences with the promoters of the inoculation, that he was jealous of his younger brother's abilities and discontinued the popular "Silence Dogood" essays when he discovered his brother was their author, that he furtively resorted to a scheme that took advantage of his brother in order to protect himself from the law, and that when again confronted by the authorities he meekly accepted their restrictions. Franklin is more properly estimated if considered in terms of the press purpose of the period of which he was a part.[12]

*The years of the party press were the "dark ages of American journalism."[13]

This evaluation is based on the assumption that the standard the press should have been living by was one of independence from politicians and of unbiased reporting and temperate editorial comment. This criticism is made without regard to the fact that no such standard was recognized at the time and that journalists positively saw their role as a political, not an independent, one. Because of the critical estimation of the party press, historians have named as its most important achievements the emergence of the editor, of the editorial form, and of reporting coverage of sessions of Congress (all aspects of today's journalism). Slighted is the fact that the party press made invaluable contributions to the development of the American political system at the most crucial time in its history.

*Editors, by the 1830s, were discontented with being controlled by politicians and were eagerly awaiting a chance to break loose. Thus, the penny press developed to some extent as a rebellion against political control.

Although it is true that with the development of the penny press more and more papers became independent of politicians, the majority of editors believed the proper place of newspapers was in the political arena, and the press did not really divorce itself from political parties until perhaps as late as 1884. Moreover, to argue that the penny press developed largely as a rebellion against political control begs the question of why and how it rapidly became so popular.

*The great preponderance of historical attention should be devoted to the "leaders" of journalism, especially those in New York City, if we are to understand the development of the American press.

This error in historical study has resulted directly from the basic assumption of continual development undergirding the progress interpretation. One therefore studies such development at its most prominent points and omits study of non-leaders, with the result that the condition of the press in general at any given period has received meager treatment.[14]

*Joseph Pulitzer, as the originator of a "new" journalism, began the modern era in journalism history.

This view rests on the assumption that the essential characteristics of the modern press include a combination of thorough news coverage, responsible editorial opinion, and popular appeal. Such an assumption, which is at the heart of the progress interpretation, is faulty. These characteristics do not describe modern journalism's essential traits or its prime motivating factors, but an idealized version of them. Pulitzer, rather than marking the beginning of modern journalism, provided the culmination of the popular press of the 19th century.

*The major newspaper developments of the 20th century have been tabloid papers, interpretative reporting, press associations, etc.

These explanations result from the same problem as does the estimation of Pulitzer's place in history: a misconception of the essential characteristics of modern journalism. The single most important occurrence has been the change of news media into business enterprises.

The developmental interpretation obviously presents problems to the explanation and understanding of journalism history. That history can be explained more accurately if we dismiss the idea that the American press has been progressing throughout its history to its present state. Along with this change in approach, we also must throw out the idea of evaluating the press of the past by the standards of today's historians. We then will be better able to see the press clearly and to describe and explain it without historical bias.

The characteristics of the press throughout the history of American journalism delineate three general, overlapping periods. The first was the era of the partisan press, extending from the beginning of American journalism to the time of the Civil War or later. The second was the era of the popular press, beginning with the penny press in the 1830s and climaxing with Pulitzer in the last part of the 19th century. The third is the era of the press for profit, whose roots extend to at

least the penny press of the 1830s but whose full force did not begin to be felt until the 1890s.

It is not enough, however, for the understanding of journalism history simply to describe characteristics of the press. We must also explain why the press was as it was. The developmental interpretation's explanation is that the press' condition at any time in history has been determined by the fact that it was moving forward in that relentless stream of progress toward fulfilling its natural role of serving the people with news, opinion, and entertainment, while being affected by outside forces such as industrialization. A more realistic explanation is that the press has had dominant purposes at certain periods and has not operated apart from the periods' commanding forms of social belief. The purpose of the partisan press was primarily political; the purpose of the popular press was to appeal to the interests of the public in a primarily non-political way; and the purpose of the contemporary press is primarily to make money.

A clearer perception of the dominance of these purposes is gained if we recognize the underlying motivations of journalists during the periods. Obviously, all these purposes have existed in some degree in various periods and in given social and intellectual milieux, which must be taken into account by historians. One can easily argue, for instance, that a purpose of the press in all three periods has been to make money; purely economic interpretations, however, fail to explain press content and behavior at given periods, except in the most general and cursory way. No economic historian has explained why, for example, Horace Greeley ceded the Tribune to his employees. Indeed, when historians do not grasp the essential factors motivating journalists, their histories lack cohesiveness precisely because the central thread of history is lost. We see this fault in a number of the survey histories of American journalism, which tend to flounder around certain years. Such confusion is especially evident in historians' narrations of recent events.

The orderliness of the events and characteristics of journalism during the three periods becomes apparent with the recognition that journalists during the periods were motivated by three philosophical world views that dominated American intellectual history at the same times. American journalism has been the child, successively, of the philosophies of rationalism, romanticism, and materialism. These philosophies have largely determined the nature of the press in the three periods.

At the same time that we see journalism history divided into three distinct periods, we should not assume that certain aspects of journalism from one period did not carry over into the next. Just as rationalism, romanticism, and materialism overlapped—and to some extent influenced—the succeeding philosophies, so earlier journalistic practices affected successive ones. These characteristic practices, however, were adapted in later periods to the purposes of those periods and should not be considered simply as building blocks of a developing journalism. The editorial, for example, has been used by journalists in each of the three periods; but in each period the purpose and nature of the editorial have been determined by the purpose of journalism at the time.

Neither should we assume that every single journalist in any particular period has had exactly the same motive. The three purposes we list were simply the dominant ones. It is also clear that the press has operated, in attempting to fulfill its purposes, within an environment influenced by such factors as technology, means of communication, and economic realities.

Without elaborating extensively on journalism history, we offer here brief summaries of the three periods, attempting in the limited time to show how the characteristics, purpose, and motivation of each tie together.

THE PARTISAN PRESS (1690 - c. 1860)

America was born in the Enlightenment. By the time of the founding of the country's first newspaper in 1690, confidence in natural law was widespread, and the concepts of natural science were being applied to human nature. Rationalists reasoned that human nature was fundamentally good and that it had been corrupted only because of bad institutions and leaders. They argued that all men inherited certain natural rights, including liberty and equality. Rulers governed not through divine right but through either usurpation or social contract. The contract did not bestow absolute power on rulers but rather entrusted them only with the power needed to protect man's natural rights. When a ruler broke the contract, reasoned John Locke, subjects had a right to replace him.[15] Jean-Jacques Rousseau altered Locke's idea by arguing that the contract was not between the ruler and the people but among the people alone. They joined in a society and established government. When they became displeased with the government, they could change it at will.[16] The ideas of Locke and Rousseau popularized drastic social and political change. In America they were manifested in a struggle between two forces which may be described in over-simplified terms as the advocates of elitism and egalitarianism.

The ideas of the Enlightenment profoundly affected the American press. For the first century and a half, editors found themselves right in the middle of the political struggle. Their purpose was not to be impartial, but to fight however they could for the victory of one side or the other. Prior to the Revolution, the battle was between Tories and Patriots. In the early national years, it was between Federalists and Republicans; and in the 1820s and 1830s it was between conservatives/patricians and democrats.[17]

The partisan motive of the press can be illustrated quite clearly with the Federalist-Republican era as a model. The sides in political conflict were well drawn. "Those who own the country," explained Federalist John Jay, "are the most fit persons to participate in the government of it."[18] Thomas Jefferson argued:

> All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.[19]

Since the nature of the political system was based ultimately on the will

of the people, appealing to public opinion became crucial. The primary tool was the newspaper. In such an environment, the press took on a political function. Its intent was to be neither a vehicle for news nor an impartial medium. Philip Freneau's journalistic creed was typical:

> For a periodical paper to be of general utility, and to support those principles on which the American Revolution was founded, and which interest every man as a free citizen of the globe, something more is required than the bare commercial or political intelligence of the times. Such a paper would constantly be engaged in bringing home those great truths to every one's reflection that most nearly concern the rights and liberties of man...[News] events should not occupy so great a space as to operate to an almost rejection of those ideas and observations, those hints and sketches of information, those lights and disquisitions, at the view of which tyrants tremble, and every description of the invaders of the rights of man sink back into annihilation and insignificance.[20]

Clearly, the intent was not to be primarily a news medium. Nor was it to be impartial. "It is as incongruous," wrote the editor of the Baltimore American and Daily Advertiser, "for a publication to be alternately breathing the spirit of Republicanism and Aristocracy as for a clergyman to preach to his audience Christianity in the morning, and Paganism in the evening."[21]

To describe the partisan years as the "dark ages" of journalism because of the press' partisanship is historical naivete. This evaluation is based on the assumption that the functions of the press are to provide news and to remain independent of parties. Neither function was the intended one for the partisan press.

THE POPULAR PRESS (1833 - 1896)

By 1830, the European phenomenon known as "romanticism" had come to full flower in the United States. The American version, largely drawn from English poetry and German idealist philosophy, reiterated the Enlightenment doctrine of natural law and the natural goodness of man; but it went a significant step further and incorporated God, through the doctrine of pantheism, into nature. Since man was clearly part of nature, romanticism emphasized the common man as the point of God's incarnation, the rustic life as the "good life," and the temple of nature as man's proper place of worship. God's rules, both spiritual and social, manifested themselves in feelings of sympathy for nature and human kind.[22] In social philosophy and politics, romanticism's thrust was toward reform. Romanticism was

> ...life promising itself indefinite betterment in this actual world, and the vision of man's earthly perfection; or life withdrawing from the actual, and the vision of a mystical experience beyond the power of earthly abilities.[23]

The penny papers, typified by Benjamin Day's New York Sun, exhibited both aspects of this definition. The Sun regularly featured the oftentimes mystical romantic literary writings of the day and very

quickly took up the several liberal causes of the period: popular suffrage, prison reform, abolition, and temperance. The Sun was both a romantic literary journal and a clear manifestation of that side of the romantic spirit that sought to remake the world in terms of an individual sense of right and wrong, largely ignoring tenets deriving from earlier moral and social codes. Romanticism, democracy and the common man, and the various reform movements came to be interconnected in the penny papers by the general idea of social progress, largely formulated during the Enlightenment and given impetus in the 19th century by romantic optimism.[24]

Romanticism, entrenched in America by 1830 as the general social structure of feeling, could not help but have a significant impact on the redefinition of news that occurred with the advent of the penny papers. The very conception of the penny press leaned toward the romantic in that the penny papers were primarily individual enterprises with extremely limited ties to commercial or political interests. Papers such as Day's Sun and Bennett's Herald took, instead, the measure of the needs and feelings (the latter greatly stressed by the romantics) of the common man as their basis of operation—logically emphasizing, therefore, the emotional over the "correct" and "proper."

The penny papers were accordingly less concerned with accuracy and objectivity than with telling an interesting story and less with meeting the needs of their readers at the intellectual level than at the level of feeling. They featured scenes from "low" life, thought unsuitable for news by the six-penny papers, and placed everyday sensory experience at the fingertips of ordinary people, whose own lives they regularly mirrored. They featured "items," factual and fictional, that romantically depicted wild and far-away places; they were willing to create news (generally romanticized versions) when there was little or no "hard" news available; and they championed the various reform movements generally connected to the romantic ideal of the perfection of society and the advancement of the common man.

The developmental interpretation of journalism history assumes that the emphasis on news and editorial concern for social conditions occurred because journalists intuitively recognized that the functions of the press were news, non-partisanship, and affiliation with the "people," rather than with political parties, in a developing industrial and technological age. This traditional approach has partially obscured the era of the popular press by dwelling too much on technological developments, on major New York press figures as democratizing factors in journalism's battle to free itself from domination by political parties, and on refinements of journalistic techniques. The papers themselves have, consequently, been given inadequate attention as social documents whose purpose was to represent the general spirit of the age.

The popular press' redefinition of news included the general elaboration of news material well beyond the parameters delineated by the political and mercantile papers of the day, and the progress interpretation is clearly too limited in scope to give a full account of that elaboration. The picture becomes clear only when one focuses on the purposes of the popular press and on the social milieu of which the press was an integral part.

THE PRESS FOR PROFIT (1896 - present)

The developmental interpretation—founded largely on historians' perceptions of the popular press—mistakenly assumes that the essential characteristics of the contemporary press are to be found in the news-editorial-entertainment functions. These are not the fundamental traits. They are instead results of essential traits and cannot explain many of the major aspects of the contemporary press. The growth of newspaper chains, for instance, certainly has not been caused by the content function. Most of the primary developments and features of the contemporary press can be traced to the changes in its financial base and the motives of media owners.

A revolution in American culture began with the Civil War. The war gave an impetus to manufacturing, especially in the North, because of the need for materiel. The Republican party, attempting to enlarge its base beyond abolitionism, promised businessmen favorable legislation to gain their support in 1860. When the party came to national power, it carried out its promise, giving strong encouragement to business entrepreneurs with banking legislation, a protective tariff, railway expansion, and laws conducive to immigration to increase the size of the labor force. Because of business and social conditions inspired by the war, a group of businessmen psychologically suited to be aggressive entrepreneurs (known as either "captains of industry" or "robber barons," depending on a historian's point of view) emerged and were bent on gaining economic power.

After the war a new society started to emerge. By 1900 the nation was no longer agrarian; it was industrialized and urbanized. Big business had come to dominate America's economic and cultural life. To accomplish such changes, basic alterations were needed in the nation's intellectual approaches. Darwin's theories of biological evolution were adopted to explain social change. Social Darwinism went hand-in-hand with Spencerian economic philosophy, which legitimized cutthroat business practices as "survival of the fittest." So that government would not interfere with natural processes, it was urged through a policy of laissez-faire to stay away from regulations that discouraged free economic practices. The goal was profits. Business practices were employed which achieved the greatest profits. Efficiency, consolidation, elimination of competition to gain monopoly, and vertical integration were used widely. As a result of the emphasis on money, by the 1890s American society had reached the point that even traditional ideas such as "democracy," "equality," and "liberty" had taken on economic definitions. Because the prevailing economic philosophy measured everything in terms of wealth, materialism became the yardstick of success and the goal of men.[25]

It was no coincidence that Adolph Ochs made his mark on journalism beginning in 1896, when he became part-owner of the failing New York Times. Ochs' scheme of investing his money in the Times on the condition that he become majority owner when the paper began to show a profit was similar to that of the reorganization of any large company having financial problems. As owner, however, he did not become editor (as earlier American newspaper owners had been) but publisher, and his attention centered on the paper's business operation rather than its news

and opinion. Ochs believed in running a business soundly; and, as his biographer points out, he initiated the concept of a strong financial base for newspapers.[26]

The primary content function of a newspaper, Ochs believed, should be news. The Times' editorials, although less important, were economically, socially, and politically conservative, reflecting the views of the industrial/business class. In both news and opinion, Ochs stressed objectivity. Although he was not greedy to satisfy his personal desires, Ochs did reflect the entrepreneurial times in which he lived.[27] It was the Times as run by Ochs that provided a model for the era of modern journalism.

The operation of journalism as a business, motivated by the desire of owners for profit, has determined the most salient characteristics of the 20th century press. It is this essential factor that is at the heart of the growth of chain ownership, the increase of newspaper monopolies (one-paper cities), and the dramatic rise in the value of media properties. While the relationship of the profit motive to these developments seems evident, the profit motive also helps explain such diverse aspects of contemporary journalism as the disappearance of the "personal editor," domination by the news function and objectivity, decline of editorial impact, standardization of contents, conservatism in politics, professionalization of working journalists, the government-press relationship, and attitudes toward press freedom and autonomy. When these various characteristics are viewed from the perspective of the profit purpose of the contemporary press, they become parts of a unified story rather than unrelated features of the progress interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Because of the dominance of the progress interpretation, the study of journalism history has grown stagnant. But worse, this developmental approach has so colored our view that we have formed inaccurate pictures of the press not only of the past but also of the present. Because it attempts to explain journalism history by contemporary conditions, it has offered us only a narrow, superficial, and distorted tale. Because it sees the story of journalism as developing steadily toward a pre-ordained climax, it has even failed to recognize the point journalism has reached. Influenced by their perception of the news-editorial function journalism practiced a century ago, historians have not grasped what today's journalism is. Our historical view needs correction. Approaching the history of journalism from the perspective of press purposes should help us understand the essential nature of the press and should suggest fertile topics for study and re-examination, provide new insights, and encourage fresh explanations.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Sidney Kobre, "The Sociological Approach in Research in Newspaper History," Journalism Quarterly (1945), 12-22. A similar approach was suggested by Edwin Emery's "Correlation of Journalism History with

Social, Political and Economic Trends in America," paper presented to the AEJ annual convention, Urbana, Ill., Aug. 27-29, 1951, reprinted in Coranto (November 1951), 2-6.

[2]Allan Nevins, "American Journalism And Its Historical Treatment," paper presented to the AEJ annual convention, Eugene, Ore., August 1959, reprinted in Journalism Quarterly (Fall, 1959), 411.

[3]James W. Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," Journalism History (Spring, 1974), p. 4 (revised version of paper presented to the AEJ annual convention, 1973). Butterfield's critique of the Whig school may be found in The Whig Interpretation of History (London, 1931) and The Englishman and His History (Cambridge, 1944), 31-81. The Whig historians favored the British parliament over the crown and, according to Butterfield, tended "to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present." Behind this Whig interpretation lay the theory that the past is studied for the sake of the present. Thus, historians make choices, Butterfield argued, according to the standards of their day. (The Whig Interpretation of History, 4, 24, 30-31.) Carey thus was correct in pointing out that journalism historians have told their story in terms of progress, but he analyzed this progress simply as that of freedom of information ("knowledge"), whereas the idea of progress in historians' minds cannot be defined in such a way.

[4]Joseph McKerns, "The Limits of Progressive Journalism History," Journalism History (Autumn, 1977), 88. Some reviewers have assumed that by the term "Progressive," McKerns intended primarily the idea of progress. Indeed, the "Progressive Interpretation" does involve the element of progress. However, it means much more. The Progressive (or "New History") school of historians emerged, much like the progressive reform movement from which the name was taken, in response to the domination big business had on American life. The historians were eager to fulfill in America true democracy, which meant a protracted struggle against those individuals, classes, and groups who had barred the way to the achievement of a more democratic society in the past. The function of the historian, they believed, was to explain how the present came to be and to point out guidelines for future development in order to contribute to a better world. While the idea of progress thus was a part of the Progressive interpretation, McKerns emphasized instead the ideological overtones of the interpretation.

[5]For an informative narrative of works on historical interpretation, see Roy Atwood, "New Directions for Journalism Historiography," The Journal of Communication Inquiry (Summer, 1978), 3-14.

[6]Carey, 4-5. [7]McKerns, 91. McKerns' proposal has in it what appear to be elements similar to those of the Progressive interpretation which

he criticizes. The Progressive historians, according to Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, viewed American history as an unceasing struggle between democracy and aristocracy, between the have-nots and the haves, between the underprivileged and the overprivileged; in short, between those committed to democratic and egalitarian ideals and those committed to a static conservatism." Interpretations of American History (New York, 1967), 11.

[8]In fairness to Carey and McKerns, it must be said that their proposals have not been stated with enough detail for our criticism to be more than tentative. Journalism historians, however, might take as their model of cultural history that used by non-journalism historians. For an explanation of the cultural approach, see, for example, Jacques Barzun, "Cultural History as a Synthesis," 387-416, in Fritz Stern, The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present (Cleveland, 1956). Similarly, approaches for studying journalism history in terms of American Studies have been proposed by Marion Marzolf, "American Studies—Ideas for Media Historians?" Journalism History (Spring, 1978), 1, 13-16, and Jean Ward, "Interdisciplinary Research and Journalism Historians," Journalism History (Spring, 1978), 1, 17-19.

[9]Carey, 4.

[10]Kobre, 10. [11]Kobre, 16.

[12]See "The Partisan Press," 6-7 of this paper. Since we wrote the original version of this paper, an article by C. Edward Wilson ("The Boston Inoculation Controversy: A Revisionist Interpretation," Journalism History [Spring, 1980], 16-19, 40) has substantiated our tentative hypothesis.

[13]Although the historical concept had been inherent in histories since Frederic Hudson's of 1873, the term "dark ages" was first used by Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York, 1941). The concept has been challenged in survey histories only by Robert A. Rutland, The Newsmongers: Journalism in the Life of the Nation 1690-1972 (New York, 1973), and to a lesser extent by John Tebbel, The Compact History of the American Newspaper (New York, 1963).

[14]In a recent article, Barbara L. Cloud ("A Party Press? Not Just Yet! Political Publishing on the Frontier," Journalism History [Summer, 1980], 54-55, 72-73) has pointed out one misinterpretation which historians persist in reaffirming because they study only the big-city "leaders" of journalism.

[15]Two Treatises on Government (1689).

[16]The Social Contract (1762).

[17]This is an extreme simplification of the issues involved. Historians hotly debate the concept of Jacksonian Democracy, for example, and

some (for instance, Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War [Princeton, 1957], and Lee Benson, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case [Princeton, 1961]) have even argued that democratization was not a central issue.

[18]Quoted in James Morton Smith, Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties (Ithaca, N. Y., 1956), 420.

[19]To Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826, Andrew A. Lipscomb, editor-in-chief, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (Washington, 1903-1904), VI, 182.

[20]Time Piece, Sept. 13, 1797.

[21]May 16, 1799. For a more definitive statement on the functions of the Federalist-Republican press, see Wm. David Sloan, "Newspaper Functions in America's First Party System, 1789-1816," paper presented to the Southwest Symposium for Mass Communication, Fort Worth, Tex., Oct. 20-21, 1980. The political function of the press during the age of Jackson is analyzed in William E. Ames and Gerald J. Baldasty, "The Washington, D. C., Political Press: A Developmental History of Functions," paper presented to the AEJ annual convention, Seattle, 1978.

[22]Stow Persons, American Minds (New York, 1975), 22[illegible].

[23]Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism (London, 1926), 155.

[24]Russell Blaine Nye, Society and Culture in America, 1830-1860 (New York, 1974), 26. Nye writes, "After the turn of the nineteenth century, the American idea of progress became much more kinetic and positive. The nineteenth century believed that men could so manipulate their society that progress could be materially hastened."

[25]This interpretation is implicit in many histories of the period. A concrete exposition of the theme is provided by Ray Ginger, Age of Excess: The United States from 1877 to 1914 (New York, 1965).

[26]Gerald Johnson, An Honorable Titan (New York, 1946).

[27]Coincidentally, it was also in 1896 that Pulitzer forsook much of the responsible attitude he had exercised with the New York World and descended to the battle of Yellow Journalism with William Randolph Hearst because the World's profits were endangered.